Branches Learning

Family Guidebook

Introduction

We are pleased to invite you to the dynamic learning environment at Branches Learning. This family handbook is designed to orient you with our educational framework and our joint responsibilities. We encourage you to carefully review each section and do not hesitate to contact us with any inquiries or issues.

Mission Statement

Branches Learning is rooted in engaging, accessible learning experiences that foster intellectual curiosity and critical thinking. We are committed to expanding learning options by partnering with schools, organizations, and families to provide high-quality, engaging, and flexible educational experiences.

Diversity Statement

At Branches Learning, diversity enriches our learning environment, broadens perspectives, and fosters a sense of belonging for every community member. We are committed to creating an inclusive space where students, families, and staff from all backgrounds feel valued, respected, and empowered to thrive.

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Section 1: Courses

At Branches Learning, we provide a comprehensive virtual learning environment for K-12 students. Our educational approach emphasizes problem-solving to cultivate lifelong learners and individuals who can initiate change. Our courses are multidisciplinary, blending project-based learning with social-emotional development.

1.1 What are Interdisciplinary Courses?

In these courses, students explore various subjects together within a single class framework. For instance, a science class might also focus on enhancing mathematical and language arts abilities. Interdisciplinary courses inspire students to:

- Delve deeply into subjects
- Draw comparisons and distinctions between different disciplines
- Simulate real-life scenarios
- Explore and resolve complex issues

1.2 What is Project-Based Learning (PBL)?

This learning model involves students tackling real-life problems through projects that have personal significance. They pinpoint an issue, conduct thorough research, and formulate a solution backed by evidence. Project-based learning helps students to:

- Become adept at solving problems and working collaboratively
- Connect personally with their studies
- Enhance understanding and memory of the subjects
- Work independently and think critically

1.3 What is Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)?

This aspect of learning focuses on developing essential life skills, including self-awareness, self-management, understanding social cues, building relationships, and making responsible decisions. Benefits of social-emotional learning include:

- Higher chances of graduating from both high school and college
- More successful professional lives
- Building positive personal relationships
- Improved mental health management

1.4 Live Courses

Branches Learning hosts live sessions, covering all primary subjects and selected electives. For details on our offerings, please check the [Branches Learning website](#).

Section 2: TK-12 Tutoring

We are delighted to offer assistance in helping your child reach key objectives. Our tutoring team is dedicated to providing an individualized educational experience tailored to each student's unique needs. Live tutoring sessions are available in durations of 30 to 60 minutes.

2.1 Enrolling

All students are welcome to register for tutoring services; they do not need to be associated with a school or organization.

Blue Ridge Academy - Families interested in enrolling in this school-sponsored program should follow the instructions on our website. After your student is registered and Blue Ridge has authorized the enrollment, we will finalize the setup.
Students are allocated four hours of tutoring per month with one tutor unless Blue Ridge informs Branches Learning of a permitted extension.
Families interested in additional sessions should submit a purchase order to Blue Ridge or make payments online using a credit card.

Non-Blue Ridge Families - Follow the enrollment steps provided on our website. We have a variety of tutoring options available to suit the needs of your family.

2.2 Processes and Policies

- Only one enrollment per student is required for the entire school year. If your student's account is inactivated, email info@brancheslearning.org when you wish to reactivate the account.
- We will pair your child with a tutor as swiftly as possible.
- Students are required to have a functional internet connection, a camera, and a microphone.
- The parent will receive a link to the tutor's calendar for booking sessions, and the student will receive an invitation to a Google Classroom to access the sessions. They must accept the invitation before any sessions can happen. No code is needed to enter the classroom.

- Students often require assistance with their classroom curriculum; if no materials are shared, parents must inform the tutor about the topics to cover before the session.
- If the student does not have specific material to review, the tutor may use some session time to plan the lesson.
- We reschedule sessions missed due to our tutor's absence whenever possible.
- Sessions canceled less than two hours in advance will incur regular charges.
- A student is considered a "no-show" if they fail to log in within the first 15 minutes of the session, resulting in the loss of that session and billing by the tutor.
- Repeated "no-shows" may lead to removal from the tutoring schedule by Branches Learning.
- Students who do not schedule sessions within the first two weeks of being assigned a tutor may be inactivated. To reactivate, the parent must email their request to info@branches learning.org. *They should not file a new order.
- Parents/Guardians/Teachers can request short updates from the tutor during the scheduled time.
- Parents can request a change of tutor if there are scheduling conflicts.
- Parents can request a change of tutor if it seems beneficial for their student. However, to support continuity and learning, we typically limit such requests to one per student—unless the current tutor is no longer able to continue. Our goal is to establish stable and productive learning relationships between students and tutors.
- Tutors can request to transfer a student to a different tutor if it benefits the student or due to conflicting schedules.
- Tutoring spots are assigned on a first-come, first-served basis.
- We strive to accommodate special requests regarding tutor assignments.
- If a tutor is absent and the student needs immediate assistance, please contact us at info@BranchesLearning.org to inquire about a substitute tutor.

Section 3: General Operations

3.1 Academic Calendar

Please refer to the Branches Learning website for the latest academic calendar.

3.2 Course Schedules

Live Courses: Branches Learning offers over 70 classes that meet once, twice, or three times each week. To learn more about our courses and schedules, please visit the Branches Learning website.

3.3 Attendance Policy

Attendance is mandatory for all scheduled live classes. If a student has two consecutive unexcused absences, Branches Learning will contact the family and the Homeschool Teacher (HST)/Teacher of Record (TOR). If a student cannot attend a class, the parent or guardian should inform the facilitator before the start of class (teacher emails are listed on the course syllabus, posted in the Branches' course catalog). Unauthorized absences could adversely affect grades. Recordings of live sessions are available upon request.

3.4 Learning Management System (LMS)

Branches Learning employs a learning management system for all its courses. Each student has a personal account where they are registered for their courses. This system houses all assignments, submissions, and grades. Login information is provided to families about one week before classes start.

3.5 Course Materials

Where relevant, essential course materials are detailed under each course description on our website.

3.6 Assignments and Assessments

Our facilitators regularly assign and assess work in various formats, some of which may necessitate additional time beyond class hours. It is expected that all students complete their assignments within the specified time frames to avoid negative impacts on their grades. Assignments turned in late will not receive full credit unless the teacher has pre-approved a late submission.

Section 4: Daily Operations

4.1 Log-In Procedures

Students must log into their LMS classroom and the corresponding Google Meet session on each day they have a live class. Links and login details are distributed to families.

4.2 Daily Schedule

The daily schedule varies for each student depending on their course enrollment. All live courses are scheduled between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. PST.

4.3 Attendance

Students are required to attend Google Meets promptly and ensure their cameras are operational.

4.4 Substitute Facilitators

In the event of a facilitator's absence, notifications will be posted in the LMS and sent via email. Typically, a substitute will conduct the class or the regular facilitator will provide a recorded lesson.

Section 5: Communications

5.1 Expectations for Communication

Refer to the Branches Learning Responsibility Chart to determine whether to contact Branches Learning staff or your assigned Homeschool Teacher (HST)/Teacher of Record (TOR).

5.2 Contact Information

- Office Hours: 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM Pacific Time
- Phone Number: (888) 979-0114
- Email: info@BranchesLearning.org

Section 6: Student Conduct

We uphold a culture of respect, responsibility, integrity, and kindness, which forms the basis of our expectations for student behavior.

6.1 Respectful Communication

Students are required to engage in respectful, polite, and constructive communication with instructors and peers. Inappropriate communication may result in a warning, disciplinary action, or suspension from the course.

6.2 Academic Honesty

Students must submit only their original work. Any form of plagiarism, cheating, or academic dishonesty will result in disciplinary action, possibly including a failing grade for the assignment or course.

6.3 Student Behavior and Consequences

- Students must actively participate in live sessions, complete assignments punctually, and take responsibility for their learning. Persistent disengagement, such as consistent non-participation or failure to submit assignments, may affect their progression in the program.
- Students must avoid disruptive behavior during live sessions and abstain from cyberbullying or violating privacy, which will lead to immediate disciplinary action.
- Victims of bullying or other inappropriate behavior should immediately report the incident to their course facilitator or Homeschool Teacher (HST)/Teacher of Record (TOR) for resolution.
- Offensive language or gestures are prohibited.
- Students must use accurate login information for virtual classrooms. Impersonation will result in disciplinary action.
- Cameras must be on at the beginning of class for attendance and security; cameras may be turned off after class starts if a waiver is filed. For waiver information, contact info@BranchesLearning.org.
- Personal information (e.g., phone numbers, login credentials, social media accounts) should not be shared.
- Behavioral expectations apply to all virtual meeting spaces used for classes.
- Issues between students outside the classroom that affect any class will be handled as vendor and school issues.

6.3.1 Consequences

Non-compliance with behavior expectations will prompt intervention by Branches Learning facilitators and administration, potentially involving counseling and communication with relevant parties (parents/guardians, teachers, administrators). Serious violations might be escalated to the disciplinary committee, potentially leading to suspension or expulsion.

6.4 Learning Tools and Settings

- **Equipment:** A computer or Chromebook is recommended for online learning; tablets are less suitable.

- **Learning Space:** Students must be in a distraction-free area. If disruptions occur, the student may need to use noise-canceling headphones or be removed from the class.
- **Supervision:** Parents and guardians are responsible for supervising their students to ensure policy adherence.

Section 7: Technology

7.1 Hardware Requirements

Students must have the specified minimum hardware to participate in Branches Learning courses. This includes a computer, laptop, or tablet with internet access, as well as a webcam, microphone, and speakers.

7.2 Software Requirements

It is essential for students to keep their device operating systems updated to prevent issues with accessing course materials.

7.3 Digital Literacy

Students should possess basic digital skills before attending their first class. This includes knowing how to use a mouse and keyboard, navigate web pages, click links, and perform copy/paste functions.

7.4 Tech Support

Students should contact their facilitator during class for any technical issues. Facilitators will assist in resolving these issues as quickly as possible.

7.5 Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Students must, at all times, follow and adhere to the Branches Learning AI Use Policy found here: https://brancheslearning.org/policies/ai-policy/

Section 8: High School

8.1 Course Offerings

For a detailed list of high school course offerings at Branches Learning, please visit our website.

8.2 College Readiness

High schools in California may self-certify Branches Learning A-G courses to meet the University of California and California State University requirements for college admission. If you have questions about this topic, please contact your HST/TOR or school administration.

Section 9: Parents and Academic Coaches

9.1 Guidance

Students are expected to complete assignments outside of classroom hours, requiring support from parents, tutors, or their Homeschool Teacher (HST)/Teacher of Record (TOR). Our facilitators prepare students as thoroughly as possible, but additional support may be necessary to complete these tasks.

9.2 Grading Policy

Teachers update grades weekly, and grade reports are sent to parents, HSTs/TOR, and students. You can also view student grades by having them log in to their Google Classroom account. If a cumulative grade is needed, contact the teacher directly via email (teacher emails are listed on the course syllabus, which is posted on the Branches' course catalog).

9.3 Work Sample Policy

Parents are responsible for providing work samples to their HST/Teacher of Record. A student work folder is created in Google Classroom containing submitted assignments. During monthly meetings with the HST/Teacher of Record, students can log in to their accounts and share their work. Parents can also provide samples of work done outside of class.

9.4 Tips

We advise establishing a regular homework schedule to help manage time effectively. Create a quiet, well-lit study area free from distractions. Encourage short breaks to maintain concentration and allow for independent work to foster self-reliance and critical thinking. Celebrate achievements to motivate students. Remember, homework is a chance to develop essential life skills such as time management and problem-solving. To receive routine class summaries, which include assignments, missing work, and announcements, parents/coaches may request a [Guardian Account for Google Classroom](#).

9.5 Communication

- Parents and HSTs/TOR will receive weekly class summaries, which include assignments, missing work, and announcements.
- For students with an IEP, communication about specific needs is crucial. Our facilitators will adapt to these needs as much as possible.
- Meetings with course facilitators may be arranged occasionally; however, your primary contact remains the Homeschool Teacher (HST)/Teacher of Record (TOR).
- Please avoid discussing personal issues during live courses, as our staff focuses on the class as a whole.

9.6 Security

Discuss the importance of online privacy with your child. Students should not share personal information, such as phone numbers, login details, or social media accounts.

Section 10: Policies

10.1 Enrollment and Withdrawal Policies

10.1.1 Enrollment Policy

Enrollment for courses starts early July and continues up to two weeks after the semester begins, with some exceptions.

10.1.2 Withdrawal Policy

Withdrawals must be processed through the student's school organization. Contact your Homeschool Teacher (HST)/Teacher of Record (TOR) for assistance, and they will liaise with Branches Learning.

10.1.3 Refund Policy

Refunds are available if requested within two weeks of the course start date and must include all relevant details. Refunds are prorated, with full refunds available if courses are dropped before the start date. Refunds are not available once courses begin, as per Blue Ridge policy for full-year courses.

10.2 Camera Policy

Cameras must be on during live classes to enhance learning, foster a sense of community, and ensure safety. Camera waivers require approval from the Branches Learning team members and the student's HST/Teacher of Record.
Camera Etiquette: The dress code for virtual classes should mirror that of physical classrooms.

10.3 Learning Environment Policy

Students must attend classes from a quiet environment, as background noise from televisions, conversations, or other sources disrupt the learning experience for everyone. If disruptive settings persist, the Branch's administration will meet with the family to address the issue.

10.4 Privacy Policy

All students' personal data is confidential and only accessible to Branches Learning staff. Course recordings are not shared outside of the student's immediate educational circle.